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MMOZine

Issue 31 | July 2011

Free Magazine For MMO Gamers. Read it, Print it, Send it to your mates

FEATURE!

RUNES OF MAGIC: LANDS OF DESPAIR

THE LATEST AND GREATEST RUNES UPDATE YET?

GODS AND HEROES: ROME RISING REVIEW + RIFT 1.3 UPDATE REVEALED

+ PREVIEWED

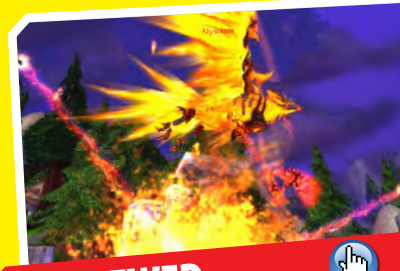
Vindictus

Finally heading to Europe!

+ PREVIEWED

End of Nations

C&C meets MMO



+ REVIEWED

WoW 4.2

A hefty update, but is it enough?

Welcome to MMOZine

Gamescom is nearly here now, and it's sure to be a big one this year, but there's plenty to keep us all occupied while we wait for that.

For starters, there's been some impressive updates released recently, including Lands of Despair for Runes of Magic and Rage of the Firelands (which does much to silence critics of WoW 4.1), both of which are featured in this issue.

We've also got a in-depth look at Vindictus, an attractive-looking action MMO that's impressed audiences around the world and is due for a European Beta very shortly, as well as a hands-on preview of End of Nations, the C&C-style MMO.

It's a game-packed issue, and there's plenty more to come this year, too. Enjoy.

Dean Mortlock, Editor
mmozine@gamerzines.com

MEET THE TEAM

The MMOZine massive were told to go forth and multiplay, which they did…

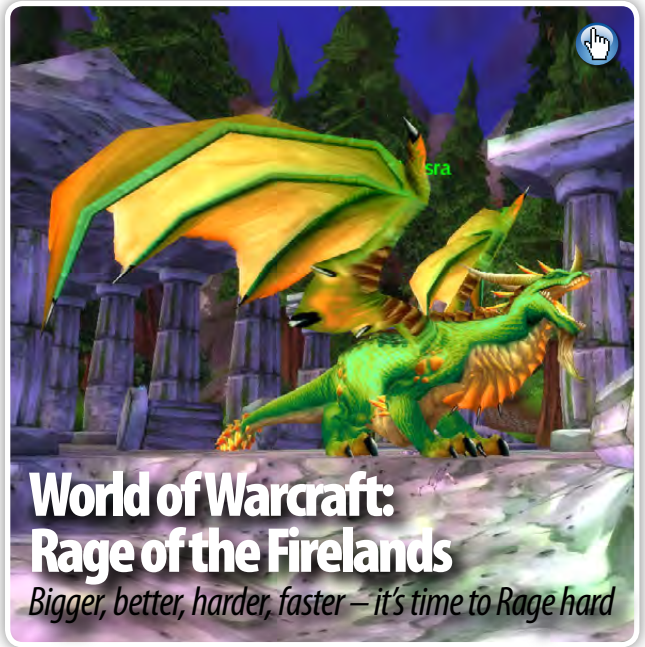
LESLEY SMITH
What she doesn't know about WoW really isn't worth knowing.

ANDY GRIFFITHS
Say hello to Andy. Our PC gaming expert also edits our sister mag, *PCGZine*.

DON'T MISS!

This month's highlights…

RUNES OF MAGIC: LANDS OF DESPAIR
Don't despair, check out our RoM feature inside!



World of Warcraft: Rage of the Firelands
Bigger, better, harder, faster – it's time to Rage hard

Vindictus

Gods and Heroes

QUICK FINDER

Every game's just a click away

- Warhammer 40K: Dark Millennium Online
- City of Heroes: Freedom
- Transformers Universe
- World of Planes
- Defiance
- Vindictus
- End of Nations
- Rift 1.3
- World of Warcraft 4.2: Rage of the Firelands
- Runes of Magic: Lands of Despair
- Gods and Heroes: Rome Rising
- Mythos

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Without the multimedia playing, the magazine will look correct, but you will be missing out on all of the extra content built into each issue, like videos, animated screenshots, annotations, quizzes, competitions and more.

We recommend you close and re-open the magazine and select "Play" when asked about the multimedia to enjoy the magazine as intended.

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7 UP

New MMOs and content updates to mark on your calendar with a BIG RED PEN!

Transformers Universe

Developer: Jagex | **ETA:** 2012

Jagex, of RuneScape fame, are making a browser-based MMO based on Hasbro's beloved toy line. Players will be able to side with either the Autobots or Decepticons and it will have absolutely nothing to do with Michael Bay. Yay!

Warhammer 40K: Dark Millennium Online

Developer: Vigil Games | **ETA:** TBA

THQ's Danny Bilson has revealed that their MMO based in the Warhammer 40K Universe will be playable at next year's E3 and that it's looking very special indeed. The release date is still unknown, but it's good to know that this MMO is coming along nicely.

World of Planes

Developer: Gaijin Ent. | **ETA:** TBA

Not to be mistaken with Wargaming.net's World of Warplanes, this MMO flight sim is being developed by the same team behind Wings of Prey. All of the major aerial battles from World War Two will be represented in a strictly realistic environment and best of all, this title will be free-to-play!

Terra Militaris

Developer: Snail Game | **ETA:** Out now

This free-to-play strategy title will get its first substantial update soon. The 'Conquest' expansion features an auction house, a lottery system to win rare new heroes and a daily challenge for the sturdiest of players. Expect this browser MMO to be around for a long time.

Defiance

Developer: Trion Worlds | **ETA:** TBA

From the studio that brought you Rift comes a new project which is being developed in collaboration with geeky TV network Syfy, who are producing a small-screen series in the same universe. Little is known about this shooter MMO, but the plot is penned by FarScape's Rockne S. O'Bannon and will involve foreign organisms taking over the world.

ON THE RADAR

2011
- TERA

SUMMER
- APB Reloaded

AUGUST
- Age of Empires: Online

JULY
- World of the Living Dead

City of Heroes: Freedom

Developer: Paragon Studios | **ETA:** TBA

After seven excellent years, NCsoft has decided to allow players to enjoy City of Heroes for free – without having to pay a subscription. The new revenue model will be added to the superhero MMO in a matter of months and allows users to play two characters up to level 50 and enjoy all of the hero and villain zones. However fans will still be able to subscribe and become VIP members, granting lots of additional content. When live, this update should herald a new era of popularity and success for this beloved MMO.

Fallen Earth

Developer: Reloaded Productions | **ETA:** 2012

Another month and yet another MMO adopts a free-to-play model. Recently picked up by GamersFirst, this unique apocalyptic MMORPG should prove a lot more attractive to players in the future.

ALLODS ONLINE

КРИ 2009 ЛУЧШАЯ ИГРА

КРИ 2009 ПРИЗ ЗРИТЕЛЬСКИХ СИМПАТИЙ

VOLUME 4 : ASTRAL ODYSSEY
Officially launches in Europe on 11.5.11

PLAYBACK OPTIONS: ENHANCED

Save Sarnaut's Past To Win The Future
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PC DIGITAL DOWNLOAD

Vindictus

Prove yourself in the ultimate battleground…

Publisher: Nexon
Developer: devCAT
Heritage: Dungeon Fighter Online
Link: www.vindictus.nexon.net
ETA: TBA

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of Vindictus

As MMORPGs go, Vindictus promises to be one of the most violent on the market. The whole game's emphasis is built around combat, as you develop your character's fighting skills to allow them to take on more and more powerful opponents.

Although Vindictus is brought to us by South Korean developer, Nexon, curiously enough all the in-game action takes place in a mythical fantasy setting based upon ancient Celtic legends, centred around Western traditions. Graphically the game is similar to the likes of Electronic Arts' Dragon Age series, although from the preview we saw, the focus is much more on hack-and-slash role-playing than anything else.

Having first made an appearance at last year's E3, Vindictus turned more than a few heads with its sheer destructiveness. Along with the usual swords and axes to arm yourself with, depending which character you choose, you also have the ability to cast spells.

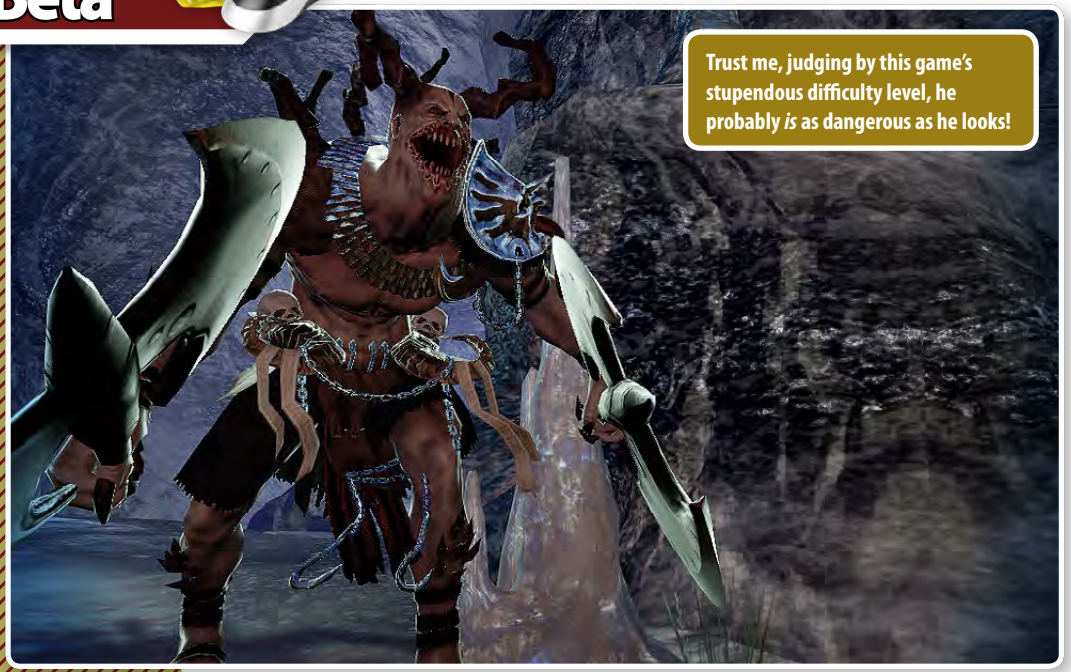
Not only is the action violent and suitably gory, but the game also allows you to interact with the

Man or beast… you will take them all on in this game.

By using combination attacks you can produce some devastating results.

RIP IT UP AND TEAR IT DOWN

One of the cleverest features of Vindictus is the ability it gives to manipulate the environment around you. If you have ever played the likes of Red Faction, you will be in familiar territory here. Not only can you destroy walls and fences, but you can pick up nearby objects to use as a weapon, throwing them or swinging them at enemies with some spectacular results.



Trust me, judging by this game's stupendous difficulty level, he probably *is* as dangerous as he looks!

Is it a bird? Is it a spider? Answers on a postcard please…

Vindictus continued

environments around you, allowing you to tear them apart and even using them as weapons.

Based upon a Source engine, the developers have included plenty of fancy graphical touches to keep you on your toes. For example, when you throw a spear at an enemy, the camera follows its path as it flies towards its target. Spells are even more spectacular.

But possibly the most impressive aspect of the graphics engine is its remarkable use of physics. The in-game environments are all destructible within reason, and you can pick up and manipulate almost every object you encounter.

Couple this with the fact that the combat takes up the whole of the screen, not just a small portion like most MMORPGs, and we have all the elements for making this a winning action-packed game. Gone is the usual formula for clicking on an opponent with your mouse and watching the battle unfold, as the fighting in Vindictus is much more involving and makes for a refreshing change among so many copycat titles that have flooded the market.

Both mouse buttons perform a different kind of attack, and the keyboard is used to perform kicks, grab an opponent or use a different weapon. It is a simple, yet very effective control set-up, and enables you to produce some stunning combination attacks. With a bit of practise you will soon learn how to knock your opponent over, pick him up and throw him against a wall before running him through with your blade. Is that violent enough for you? Yep, thought so.

So far, so good, but like anything in life, nothing is ever perfect. And in Vindictus' case, far from perfect. The preview we played through was riddled with bugs, and while graphically it looked amazing, there was still a lot of work to be done when it came to playability. Along with numerous

NATURAL BORN KILLER

Vindictus' developers have taken great care to ensure you can create a truly unique avatar…

GETTING A HEAD | SUIT YOU, SIR | FASHION VICTIM

As this shot shows you, there is a diverse range of re-rendered heads to choose between. Each of these can then be further customised to suit your own preferences.

Vindictus continued

annoying bugs (which, to be fair, will probably be ironed out in time for the final release) the difficulty level was just too high. To say it has a tough learning curve is an understatement, but we found ourselves more often than not on the losing side of any battle we became involved in.

Along with the strange quirks and overly hard going, there were also a few other annoyances that left us with the feeling that this was far from the finished product. The sound effects was monotonous and the voiceacting as a whole left a lot to be desired.

As with Nexon's other releases, Dungeon Fighter Online and the forthcoming Dragon Nest, Vindictus will be a free-to-play release funded by micro-transactions, where you make purchases in the game store. A format that is becoming increasingly popular in the market, the theory is that players will be able to experience just enough of the game to get them so far, but to advance any further in the game they will need to purchase abilities and items. One only has to look at the likes of Lord of the Rings Online and Dungeons and Dragons Online to realise just how flourishing this business model has proven to be.

How much of a success Vindictus proves to be will ultimately depend upon how polished the playing experience is. The problem with Western translations of Asian concepts is that something inevitably becomes lost along the way. From the short preview we saw this thankfully wasn't too apparent, but there were real issues with some fundamental elements of the game, and these need to be ironed out before it comes out of Beta. Rest assured as soon as we have had a chance to give this a good run for its money, you will be the first to know just how it matches up. Until then, let's hope that first impressions aren't always right.

"How much of a success Vindictus proves to be will ultimately depend on how polished the playing experience is"

It's not all hack-and-slash action, as spellcasters have more than a few tricks up their sleeves, too.

The gore factor is high in this game, so if you're squeamish, look away now.

MMOZine Verdict

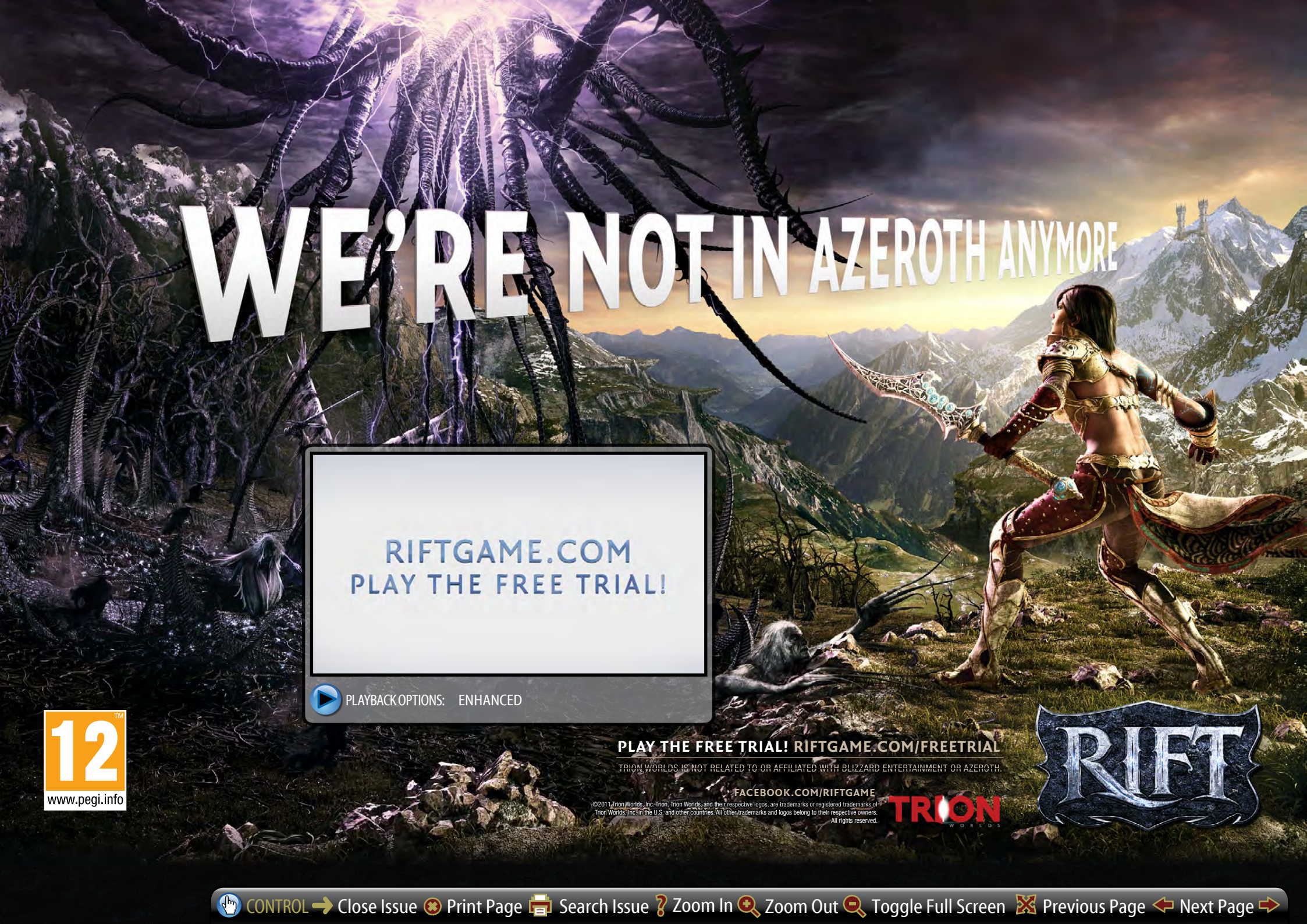
Enough action to satisfy your bloodlust, but a shame it was so frustrating to play

HOW COMPLETE

90%

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

65%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TRION WORLDS
RIFT

END OF NATIONS

Publisher: Trion Worlds
Developer: Petroglyph Games
Heritage: Mytheon
Link: www.endofnations.com/en
ETA: 2012

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of End of Nations

End of Nations

An MMO for the Command & Conquer generation

Usually when we write about a massively multiplayer strategy experience, inevitably the words browser-based creep in. It isn't that modern developers aren't ambitious enough to build a game which is capable of having dozens of players orchestrating units on a single battlefield, it's just that modern network technology isn't quite up to the job of keeping track of hundreds of different units in a massive 3D environment, and it's a lot easier to keep track of player movements when the engine only handles 2D sprites. You see, you'd need netcode good enough to keep on top of all the above and replicate it, so that each and every commander has the ability to react in real-time.

Frankly it gives us a headache just thinking about it, but recently Petroglyph showed us that not only is it possible to have 52 players taking part in one skirmish, but

Any game with a mech immediately goes up in our estimations.

Keep an eye out for any support powers raining down.

At times it seems hard to keep on top what exactly is happening, but the engine looks very impressive when all the units are giving it their all.

The railgun tank is as powerful as it looks!

End of Nations cont.

they are building a game around that socially driven RTS ideal.

Even with a cursory glance, the screenshots betray Petroglyph's lineage as a studio founded by former Westwood staffers, the acclaimed outfit behind Command & Conquer. The story behind that IP's demise is a sad one, but when looking at End of Nations, it's clear to see a lot of the design philosophy is alive and well in this new endeavour.

The plot, set in the near future, involves a world torn apart by war as two factions, the Liberation Front and Shadow Revolution, take on the ruling Order of Nations – an oppressive superpower who unified the world to solve its ills, before inevitably falling into corruption. The first two factions are playable, whereas the last is reserved as the big-bad which needs to be stomped in the game's dedicated single-player/co-op campaign, with in-game mission intros to add spice to the action. It's an interesting framework as there will be a lot of missions for players to cut their teeth on before they feel brave enough to enter competitive PvP.

You start your career by creating their own Commander, choosing an allegiance and selecting a class. Your profession will determine what sort of units will be available for missions, all of which involve a deployment cap with the more powerful vehicles costing more and reducing your tactical agility. Unit choice is elected before you head onto the battlefield, much like a card game where you need to choose your hand to correspond with the scenario or role required by your a team.

Choice varies from helicopters, rail-gun turret tanks, fast-acting APCs and exo-skeletal mechs, all of which are governed by the established rock/paper/scissors gameplay structure.

PLAY HOW YOU WANT

End of Nations' different game modes

CAMPAIGN | **CO-OP** | **PVP**

Both factions will have their own story-driven campaign to introduce the game's fiction and finer strategies to ease new players into the universe.

END OF NATIONS

End of Nations cont.

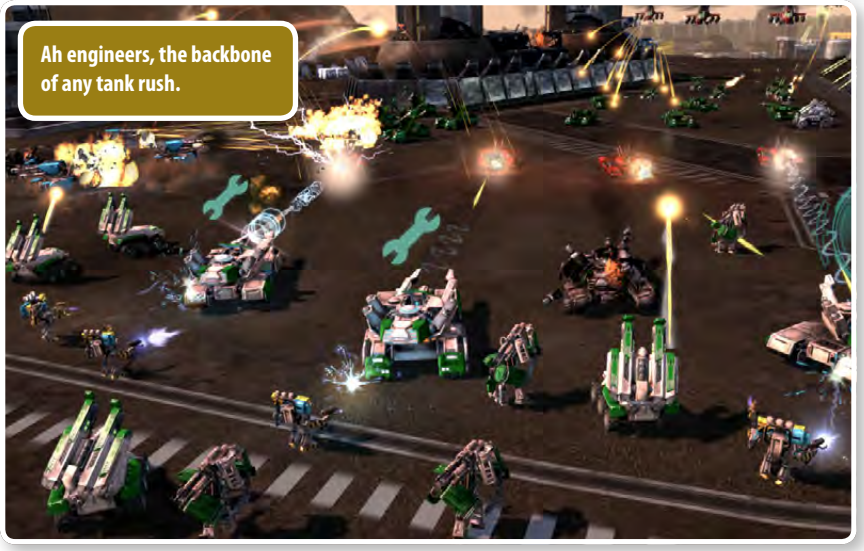
So far, so RTS, but where the MMO element comes in is the persistent world map where each faction battles to gain ownership of country-based territories. This atmospheric interface represents the main menu and looks like something straight out of the film WarGames, with a real-time ticker to show what's going on with your friends or clan, and effectively communicates that your battles matter on a grand scale, with each win contributing to your faction's tally in that region. The only missing component seemed to be the customisation angle. There is the capacity to create your own paint schemes for your forces, but we didn't see any other avenue for players to express themselves individually, which was a shame.

We sampled one of the game's more pedestrian PvP scenarios with two teams of five facing off against each other. Rather than building a base and pumping out vehicles, you can only rebuild the units you spawn at the start of a match. Every map and mission scenario will be different, but we played on a symmetrical variety with a host of points to control or seize from the enemy. There were landing zones to capture, determining where reinforcements are dropped off and supply points which when won add to your team's income to spend on new units. In addition there's also the ability to rain down support powers on unsuspecting foes like nukes and EMP bombs, as well as the potential to build certain defensive structures, such as turrets to satisfy the more turtle-minded gamers out there.

"The team has barrel-loads of experience which should translate into a solid online offering"

After only sampling a single battle it's impossible to predict how many of End of Nations' lofty MMO ambitions will come to fruition, but the team has barrel-loads of experience which should translate into a solid online offering. We'll undoubtedly hear much more about this project soon.

The scale of the battlefield is absolutely massive on 5-vs-5 matches and we can't imagine what 26-vs-26 will be like!



Ah engineers, the backbone of any tank rush.

MMOZine Verdict

An ambitious title which is definitely worth keeping an eye on

HOW COMPLETE

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

CONTROL Close Issue Print Page Search Issue Zoom In Zoom Out Toggle Full Screen Previous Page Next Page

Publisher: Trion Worlds
Developer: In-house
Heritage: N/A
Link: www.riftgame.com
OUT NOW

RIFT 1.3

An instance to remember

"This update, dubbed 'Waves of Madness', should win back some jaded subscribers"

As MMO launches go, RIFT had one of the smoothest we've seen for some time. A considerable achievement considering as it was Trion World's debut, yet understandably there were still some basic features missing. 'They' say that Rome wasn't built in a day and likewise MMO construction can take a while, so when we checked out the 1.3 update we were anticipating something incidental, but in fact this update, dubbed 'Waves of Madness', should do some way to winning back some jaded subscribers.

The headline-grabbing feature is the Hammerknell Raid – an 20-man instance which is set inside an ancient temple, which is the former centre of Dwarven Civilisation.

Venturing into this labyrinth will result in players being greeted by 10 of the meanest bosses in the game, grand Gothic halls and a hive area corrupted by death which looked like a scene ripped straight our of the Alien films. All of the environments were fresh and new in our eyes, and retained that grandeur which RIFT has become known for. We weren't privy to how long it would take a well-drilled team to navigate this raid, but it's certainly being aimed at the most talented of players.

Additionally there will be a world event to commemorate this new update, with Water and Death forces providing the main combatants. This will be the second time Trion Worlds has tried to implement a live event and the team told us that lessons have been learned from the 'River of Soul's' debacle. Events will now remain open for six weeks, giving more time for everyone to get involved and, crucially, allowing time for the team to rectify any issues players come across.

All that sounds well and good, but what about adding some of that basic functionality we mentioned before? Well there will be free server transfers for players and guilds en masse with a restriction of one move per week, the ability to share funds between different players in any given guild and new PvP daily quests to further enliven the community scene. Sounds good to us.

With boxed copy sales nearing the one million benchmark and a development team which works quickly to respond to specific player requests, the future of RIFT looks very bright indeed.

NEW ARMOUR SETS

1.3 will also include special class-based armour sets. So far, so regular, but the kicker is each set will also have a new modifier – a Synergy Crystal. These new socket items are available for each soul in the game and they'll grant specific stat bonuses depending on your soul tree setup. And you thought the skills system was flexible before…

MMOZine Verdict

A small but worthwhile update to an already stellar experience

HOW COMPLETE
100%

FIRST IMPRESSIONS
85%

DRAGONICA.GPOTATO.EU

DRAGONICA

REDISCOVER DRAGONICA

PLAYBACK OPTIONS: ENHANCED

STEP 1 REGISTER AT DRAGONICA.GPOTATO.EU

STEP 2 DOWNLOAD THE GAME CLIENT

STEP 3 INSTALL AND PATCH THE GAME TO THE LATEST VERSION

STEP 4 LOG IN WITH YOUR GPOTATO.EU USERNAME AND PASSWORD

gPotato WWW.GPOTATO.EU

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Rage hard

Could 4.2 be WoW's biggest patch yet? This man seems to think so…

> *"If we could've launched 4.2 two or three weeks ago, would that have better? Maybe"*

As Rage of the Firelands descends on Azeroth, we sit down with Greg 'Ghostcrawler' Street, the Lead Systems Designer for World of Warcraft, to find out more.

So what happened with 4.1 and the decision to move the Firelands raid back to 4.2?

We had a couple of different plans in mind and, originally, we were going to release that content pretty quickly after Cataclysm launched. We looked at where players were, particularly in the raid content, and we said: "You know, they're not done with the content." A lot of players hadn't finished it on heroic and many had only finished the end bosses on normal difficulty. We were scared that we'd release something too soon and players wouldn't be ready for the new content. It's really hard to nail it perfectly but I'd say now we're hearing from lots of players: "Hey, I'm ready for all that new content. When's it coming out?"

So the decision to wait has paid off for you?

Yeah, I think so. If we could have launched 4.2 two or three weeks ago, would that have been better? Maybe. But it's really hard to nail it perfectly so that players are desperate for new content without us feeling that we're kneecapping the previous tier.

The firehawk Alysrazor is a fearsome adversary who awaits you in a new raid.

The Blue Dragons have their own important storyline that will award a legendary staff.

Interview continued

The Firelands is an epic raid. Is this because you can choose the order that you kill the first four bosses?
Yeah, and the raid feels very different as a result. It's a different environment for us, as you're not going down a dungeon corridor with a fork in the road. You're actually on what feels more like a continent so you can go whatever direction you want and fight whatever trash that you want to fight next.

So what about Ragnaros. This is going to be the final time we kill him, right? No setbacks?
It's hard to kill off bosses because we always have need for more of them in the future. At the very least, it's going to be a while before he could reform himself. But then again, maybe not; maybe this is it for him forever?

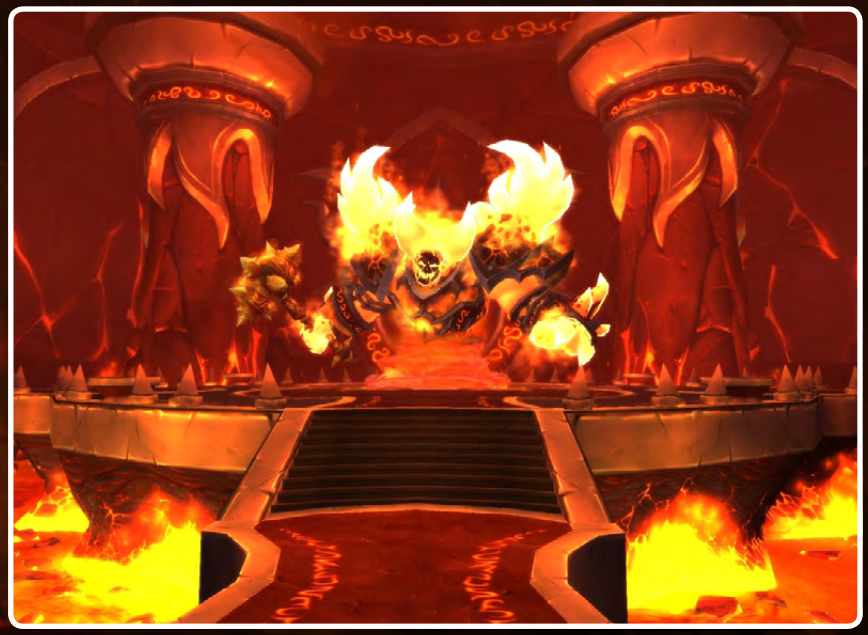
Ragnaros' model is amazing, particularly the much-discussed addition of legs.
Well you're not even going to see them on normal mode, that's going to be a more traditional Molten Core-style encounter.

So how are you pitching the Dungeon Journal?
The way I explain it is that it does a couple of things. We're all used to a boss breathing fire. We don't really know what that's doing, is it targeting a player or an area? Yeah you can figure it out, if you die a few times, but that's not very heroic. No one's going to suggest, 'oh let's all die here and then later we'll read the combat log to see what that was'. It also aids in communication, too.

I think we've all been in the dungeon where the leader is saying the boss is going to cast some kind of lightening spell. He can't remember the name of it but interrupt it if you see it. Well now with the Dungeon Journal, you can look it up and the leader can just link it. That way you know and you all have a shared frame of reference.

The Blue Dragonflight questline and the new legendary staff (Dragonwrath, Tarecgosca's Rest) are the big draws in this patch. Why did you decide to conclude the storyline now, after Wrath?
It came from a couple of things: we felt like the players

> *"It's hard to kill off bosses because we always have need for more of them in the future"*



4.2 will also see a new Aspect chosen to replace the long-dead Malygos.

Interview continued

were kind of wondering what's the status of the Blue Dragonflight ever since Malygos died? The other part of it is we really wanted to remind players this patch was very focused on the Firelands and the Elementals but that, ultimately, Cataclysm is the story of dragons and Deathwing in particular. So we wanted to have a way of getting dragons back on players' minds, and the dragonflights are going to play a big roll in the eventual fight against Deathwing so what's happening now is very important.

So what about the Thrall Elemental Bonds questline? Do you worry Thrall is becoming the poster Orc for WoW?
No, he's awesome! Thrall needs more screen time! Seriously, we

"Thrall is a really major character, and he's going to be really important in the ultimate fight against Deathwing

felt like we needed to talk about Thrall a little more, particularly for Alliance players who may not be as 'in the know' about what's going on with Thrall and Garrosh. Thrall is a really major character and, like the Dragonflights, he's going to be really important in the ultimate fight against Deathwing. So we really wanted to make sure players hadn't forgotten about him.

So what's your favourite feature of Rage of the Firelands?
Well I love the raid – the legendary questline is super epic – but personally I think I'm most excited about the Molten Front (the new daily quest hub) because it's something totally new for us. At the end of the day, we think it's going to feel like a new zone for players. Yeah it's a cross between a new zone and the Isle of Quel'Danas (from patch 2.4: Fury of the Sunwell).

Do you think 4.2 will be the patch which lures people back to WoW?
It's a really epic patch and I think it does a really good job of capturing the nostalgia of what,

The combined forces of the Alliance and Horde gain a foothold in the Molten Front.

for many players, was their very first raid encounter. But also there's so much new content with the Molten Front zone, the Thrall questline and the Dungeon Journal. We think that it's a lot of content to come midway through and expansion.

Some of the coolest aspects of 4.2 are the new emotes and animations. Are these really important ways of rounding out the patch?
Yeah, we don't want players to think that it's all about the raiding. There are a load of them who don't raid and for them that's not what the game is about. We want them to know that there will be features for them, too. The game is constantly evolving and we're always trying to improve it. We're not content simply resting on our laurels and we have a really long list of things that we'd like to implement eventually.

Publisher: Blizzard Entertainment
Developer: Blizzard Entertainment
Heritage: Warcraft, StarCraft, Diablo
Link: www.wow-europe.com
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Publisher: Blizzard Entertainment
Developer: Blizzard Entertainment
Heritage: Warcraft, StarCraft, Diablo
Link: www.wow-europe.com
OUT NOW

World of Warcraft: Rage of the Firelands

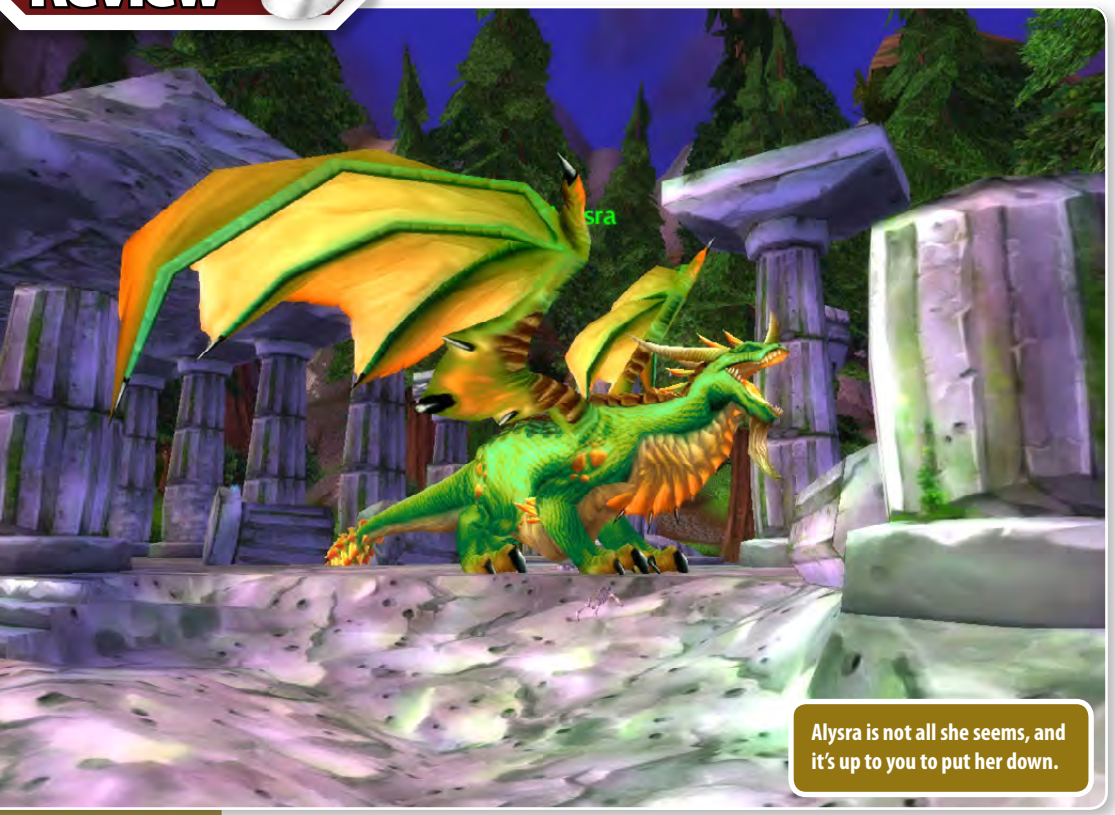
Out of the frying pan and into the fire

Blizzard has had a tough time since Cataclysm launched. Many people complained the dungeons were too hard, others just complained. The game felt unfinished and a tad rushed, and the addition of recycled content in 4.1 didn't do them any favours either. Initially players were shocked that the Firelands were being moved back to 4.2 but Blizzard seemed hopeful that the extra development time would ultimately pay off. It was a risky but much needed strategy which added another three months and plenty of testing on the PTR. From the looks of Rage of the Firelands, it seems that the gamble has paid off.

The Firelands introduces a new zone, the realm of the Fire Lord Ragnaros. It's not a pleasant place with fiery mobs, flaming critters and a general overdose of… well, fire – it's not called the Firelands for nothing, you know. The main storyline focuses on Ragnaros' attempt to destroy the World Tree Nordrassil, and it's up to level 85 characters to stop him.

There are two ways to do this. The first is a new daily quest hub called the Molten Front where you can side with the Druids of the Talon or the Shadow Wardens (which long-time players will recognise as the faction Maiev Shadowsong, Illidan's jailer, belonged to). Hyjal itself has been restored to its former glory and it's even more beautiful, with even more dailies to complete. Formally devastated areas are now lush havens and yet there's still danger. You must secure The

Essence of Doubt
Essence of Doubt
Thrall
The Elemental Bonds questline sees you visiting the various planes to restore Thrall's soul.



Alysra is not all she seems, and it's up to you to put her down.

Who is this mysterious stranger? Night Elves will know him well.

WoW 4.2 continued

Regrowth and then venture into the new quest hub, the Molten Front.

The Molten Front is a huge area but it's not all available to you instantly. Rather, much like the Isle of Quel'Danas, the area unlocks over a period of time, depending on your personal progress. At the same time, for the first time in WoW, areas are phased with what Blizzard is calling 'personal invisibility', a system which phases the area but still allows you to play with and see other people. As you progress, more quests are unlocked and the completion of the entire questline rewards the player with an epic flying mount, the magnificent Flaming Hippogryph.

The second line of attack is through the Firelands raid itself. You and your companions have to defeat six bosses, including Majordomo Fandral Staghelm, formally the Alliance's most annoying Archdruid. These bosses included a former dragon-turned-firehawk and a giant spider among various monstrosities. The raid is made more entertaining by the fact that you can choose which order you fight the first four, you then face the Gatekeeper before moving onto Staghelm and his master, The Firelord himself.

Thrall of duty

But that's not all. Ragnaros is determined to get Thrall, ex-Warchief of the Horde and now one of Azeroth's most powerful Shamans, out of the picture. He has Staghelm cast Thrall's soul into the four Elemental Planes and it's therefore solely up to us to go and rescue him. If we can't then all will be lost and it's likely we'll lose a vital ally in the final fight against Deathwing. This involves revisiting old raids as going into the Firelands.

The final questline is the one DPSer's have been waiting for. This one focuses on the Blue Dragonflight's quest to find a new Aspect to replace Malgyos, the mad blue dragon we killed during Wrath. There are two candidates for this lofty position and you've got to help them choose the successor during the Embrace, a rare eclipse of Azeroth's two moons. This involves seeking the aid of the dragoness Tarecgosa who, if you are successful and complete the questline, will see you gain a legendary staff, Dragonwrath, Tarecgosa's Rest. As well as being an amazing weapon, it

> *"The Molten Front is a huge area but it's not all available to you instantly"*

HANKERING FOR HYJAL

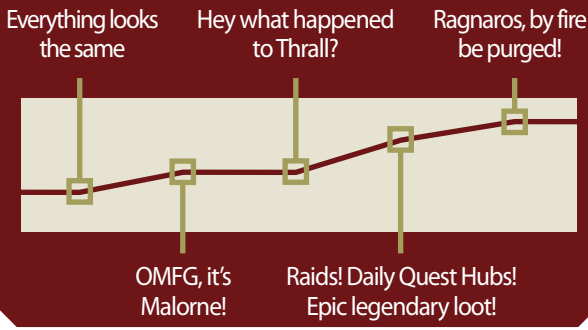
The Druid-centric area of Mount Hyjal is where much of the action and new lore takes place. So what can we expect?

ASPECTS MEETING | **DRAGON SLAYER** | **MOLTON PRE-QUESTS**

The Four Dragon Aspects meet to heal Azeroth, but it doesn't go to plan.

Lore abounds as you watch the rebirth of Alysra into a servant of Ragnaros.

PULSOMETER: Signs of life


Everything looks the same
Hey what happened to Thrall?
Ragnaros, by fire be purged!
OMFG, it's Malorne!
Raids! Daily Quest Hubs! Epic legendary loot!

WoW 4.2 continued

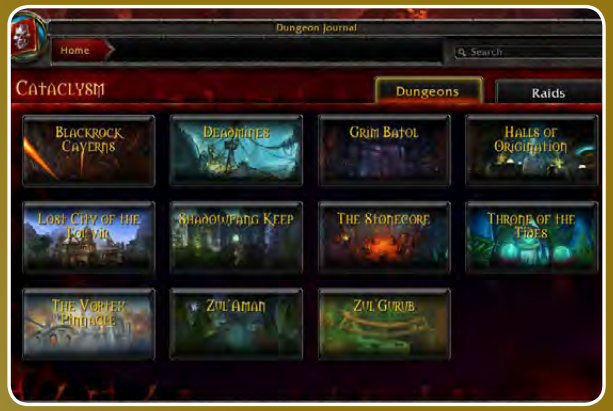
will allow you to take Tarecgosa's form. Even better, everyone in a guild where someone has the staff will be given a tiny Lil' Tarecgosa pet.

But, as with previous legendries, this is no easy task. There are quests to complete which see you wander into unseen areas of the Nexus as well as discovering the nefarious plans of Deathwing himself. You will also have to battle a rogue blue Dragon, kill Ragnaros and claim his heart. It's an awesome questline with amazing rewards which will continue to further Azeroth's rich lore.

Blizzard has really pulled out all the stops with Rage of the Firelands. There's a huge amount of content to get through, and plenty for level 85's to get through. But, on top of this, Blizzard has added plenty of little tweaks that round out the patch including new animations for emotes and a new roar sound effect. It's these little touches that really make this a spectacular patch which has been well worth the wait. Blizzard has done their damnedest to try and make up for past mistakes and, in the end, Rage of the Firelands has been well worth the wait. ●

DUNGEON JOURNAL

The Dungeon Journal is one of the most-awaited additions to Rage of the Firelands. This new feature kicks in whenever you enter a Cataclysm dungeon or raid and gives much-needed info on bosses' abilities and phases, their loot tables and the best gear for every class. For most people, walkthrough videos and strategy guides are a vital part of an evening's raiding and, by adding in this feature, Blizzard is trying to keep people in the game and provide a more inclusive gaming experience. It looks amazing and, even better, abilities can be linked in chat making it much easier to discuss tactics on the fly.



MMOZine Verdict

Rage of the Firelands pulls out the stops and succeeds beautifully

- New raid and daily hub
- A legendary weapon and new lore
- The Dungeon Journal

Publisher: Frogster
Developer: Runewaker Entertainment Ltd.
Heritage: Runes of Magic
Link: www.runesofmagic.com
OUT NOW

Runes of Magic: Lands of Despair

"The new Public Encounter is set in an old cemetery that's been overrun with bloodthirsty zombies"

Whether you're a Runes of Magic veteran, been away from it for a while or totally new to the game, there's plenty to get excited about in the new expansion: Lands of Despair. Following on from our preview last issue, here's an in-depth breakdown of the highlights...

#1 THIRD NEW CLASS

This additional class becomes available to you when you've reached level 20 with both your primary and also your secondary classes. A message will inform you then that you can choose the new third class. Obviously it's not quite that easy, so what you then have to do is find the NPC called Johnny Dutin and prove to him that your ready to learn the new class. Complete the quest he sends you on and then finally head to the Class Hall of Varanas and speak to the Class instructor there. Simple.

But there's more, as a new Transport skill is also part of the reward, and this can be then used to explore a new area, the Coast of Opportunity.

#2 NEW PUBLIC ENCOUNTER

Those looking for a new Public Encounter will be pleased to hear that there's now one to be found waiting for you in the Land of Malevolence. You may not be so pleased to find out that the Encounter is set in an old cemetery that's been overrun with bloodthirsty zombies, though! Fortune favours the brave here, and if you're able to withstand the relentless attacks from the undead then you will be rewarded well for your efforts.

#3 NEW INSTANCES

Grafu Castle – Level 67, 6/12 players

Lord Grafu's castle is in the Land of Malevolence, and if you're brave enough to take on this instance then you can expect to meet a variety of dangerous enemies – including five dangerous bosses, artists and even clowns!

Sardo Castle– Level 67, 6/12 players

The Sardo castle is now the hideout of Sismond, who's conducting secret experiments and trying to raise an army of the undead! You'll need to battle through three levels of the crypt, facing skeleton warriors and the head of the castle guard.

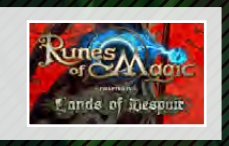
#4 TWO NEW THIRD CLASS DEVELOPMENT ZONES

Coast of Opportunity – Levels 1-42

This is a great location for those experimenting with the third class. Initially, little is known about the area, but we do know that there's plenty of history to this area. Adventurers discovered the area many years ago, and the harbour here became a hub for both travellers and also cargo. Experienced players will find plenty here to keep them occupied.

Xaviera – Levels 43-50

Quite simply, Xaviera just sounds too good to be true. Separated from the Coast of Opportunity by a dark, forboding forest that's crammed full of the undead (among other things), its rumoured beautiful villages, legendary weapons at low prices and stunning feasts sound heavenly. It's the wise adventurer who doesn't take everything on face value, though…



#5 AND THE REST

Still looking for more new features? Here's a round-up of some of the remaining highlights to keep an eye out for:

- The level cap has now been raised to 67
- World Battlefields can now be accessed through a portal in Silverspring or Dust Devil Canyon. Look out for Bolinthya Rift, which is the first challenge for your party.
- There are also two new high-level zones for more experienced players. **Land of Malevolence** is for characters between levels 63-65. As the title suggests, it's a gloomy area, but there's no shortage of things to do – and therefore rewards to earn!
  The Redhill Mountains can be found to the south-west of Malevolence, and it couldn't be more different. Sunny and filled with lush vegetation, it's also the home of two rare races: the Dwarves and the Rhinos.
- Over 300 new quests.
- Additional storage capacity for mounts and pets.
- New Runes

"There's enough new content in Lands of Despair to keep you busy for months"

THE FINAL VERDICT

The MMO universe is becoming an increasingly competitive market, and therefore it's only the strongest that will survive. Thankfully for Runes of Magic and Frogster, this new expansion is stunning. Packed full of enough content to make the majority of other MMOs feel weak and inferior, there's enough new stuff in Lands of Despair to keep you busy for months. It's essential for those who've levelled up to the required level and also a serious temptation for those who've yet to reach there to go back and improve.

NEXT MONTH: AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH LAND OF DESPAIR'S DEVELOPERS. DON'T MISS IT!

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Publisher: Heatwave Interactive
Developer: Heatwave Interactive
Heritage: Platinum Life
Link: www.godsandheroes.com
OUT NOW

Gods and Heroes: Rome Rising

All MMOs lead to Rome

"In Gods and Heroes you have the chance to recruit minions to your squad and even build and decorate your own estate"

Stuck in development hell from 2008 until February last year when Heatwave Interactive acquired the rights from Perpetual Entertainment, Gods and Heroes: Rome Rising is a MMORPG set during ancient Roman times. Neatly combining aspects of history and mythology, the game follows the familiar online questing system made popular by the likes of World of Warcraft. No surprises there, then.

Allowing you to choose between four different classes – Gladiator, Soldier, Mystic or Priest – you can customise your character by choosing a name, adjusting their appearance and selecting which god to follow. Once that is done you can access the game world where you are led through a simple tutorial area that introduces you to all of the basics. As you complete quests and level up you are slowly introduced to other aspects of the game, giving you the chance to recruit minions to your squad and even build and decorate your very own estate to live in. Depending on which area you are in, you can have up to four minions at a time. Minions can be found in three different classes: either Infantryman, Skirmishers or Spellcasters, and are a great way of helping to balance out any weaknesses your character may have.

Along with building your character's stats up as you increase levels, you are also granted special skills which you can use in combat, enabling more damaging blows and combo

Your minion's help is a huge advantage during combat.

Question marks above NPCs indicate the completion of a quest.

The enemies you come across are both detailed and varied.

IT'S ALL GREEK TO ME...

Any MMO veteran will feel instantly at home with the screen layout, with Gods and Heroes borrowing many of its classic features from other games in the RPG genre. A mini-map, quest tracker, character health bar and information panel are all instantly recognisable, allowing players to jump straight in and start playing almost immediately.

Gods & Heroes cont.

attacks. In case this isn't enough clout for you, as you increase in levels you also unlock access to god powers. Depending on who you choose to follow at the start of the game, you are given specific attributes which you can call upon when needed. However, because they are so powerful you will find they can only be used a limited amount of times until you run out of favour with your chosen god. More favour can be gained by completing quests and making sacrifices to them as the game progresses.

Unlike some games of this ilk, there is plenty of variety of enemies to work your way through, even in the early stages. The first couple of hours play alone will reveal pirates, skeleton warriors, sand creatures, birds of prey and a towering colossus to keep you busy. They are all great to look at and well animated, but the developers have insisted on placing a bright red outline around any opponent when selected. While this does make it easy to see who you are attacking, this also detracts from what is otherwise a graphically sound game.

The landscapes available for you to explore are all stunning in their quality and richly detailed. No qualms there. However, you will soon grow slightly tired of them due to the incredible amount of running around you have to do. It is possible to activate travel beacons and jump from location to location, but even so we tended to find that we spent most of our time running about than doing anything else.

"The landscapes for you to explore are all stunning in their quality and richly detailed"

Talking of exploring, you are forced to use your map a lot in this game to find out where you should head for specific quests. The quest tracker is highlighted on the in-game map itself, but there are no arrows for you to

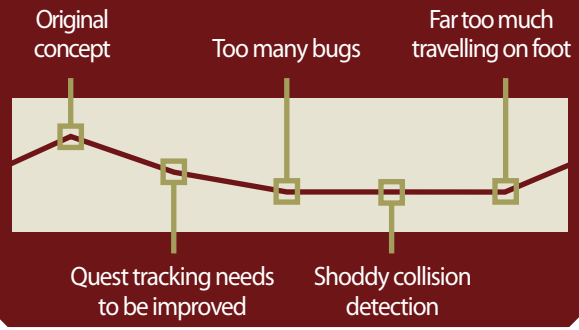
CREATING A LEGEND

Character creation in Gods and Heroes couldn't be more straightforward. Here we list the three steps you need to go through to bring your player to life.

CHOOSING CLASS | **FOLLOW THE GODS** | **CHANGING YOUR LOOK**

The first step is to select your class. Choose between a Soldier, Gladiator, Mystic or Priest, each of which have different feats and skills.

PULSOMETER: Signs of life


Original concept
Too many bugs
Far too much travelling on foot
Quest tracking needs to be improved
Shoddy collision detection

Gods & Heroes cont.

follow on the main screen, meaning you have to constantly flick backwards and forwards between them to make sure you are heading in the right direction. And yes, it really is as tedious as it sounds.

Gods and Heroes is Heatwave Interactive's first downloadable MMO, and in many ways this shows. There is nothing specifically wrong with the backbone of the game, and the basics are all in place to build upon, but it would seem that even after the Beta phase, there are still as number of worrying bugs that spoil an otherwise decent game. Collision detection issues are everywhere, and we had problems climbing hills, jumping over objects and, most bizarrely, when it came to swimming our companions seemed to be able to walk on water. We know this is supposed to be a mythological game, but even that seemed like a giant step too far.

As for combat, if we have to read the phrase 'Your character is too far away from the target' one more time then we swear we'll be sending our PCs to the lions. Surely it would have made more sense to allow your character to run up to an opponent when you click on them to initiate combat? Instead we are treated that flashing message every time we get into a fight.

While still in its early stages, it is perhaps unfair to judge Gods and Heroes on the various bugs and quirks it presently has. Yes they are annoying, but you can see the potential is here for a cracking and absorbing RPG. Give this six months and we could be onto a real winner. As it stands, it is hard to recommend it until the development glitches are all ironed out.

MMOZine Verdict

An unpolished adventure that still needs a lot of work

- ✓ Clash of the Titans fans rejoice
- ✗ Needs more playtesting
- ✗ Poor value for money

FREEZE FRAME

Taking you through your first quest…

As the game starts you find yourself on a beach, which serves as a tutorial for the game's control system.

Upon accepting your first quest you are told to report to the commander in the village just up the road.

By consulting the in-game map, you will always know where to head for your next quest.

As you discover new areas you will then gain experience accordingly.

Now talk to the man with the big question mark hanging over his head to complete your quest!

Publisher: Frogster
Developer: Hanbitsoft
Heritage: Tantra Online
Link: www.mythoseurope.com
OUT NOW

Mythos

Smash and grab

"This is the kind of experience which emphasises the cute and colourful factor to mask its age"

From the moment you boot up Mythos it becomes apparent what kind of experience you'll have. Low polygon count models, grand orchestral midi-soundtrack… this is the kind of experience which emphasises the cute and colourful factor to mask its age. For you see, this entity from HanbitSoft has been resurrected. It began life way back in 2006 under the control of Flagship Studios (now Runic Games), and as a result the overall game looks dated.

The link to Runic Games' Torchlight isn't a coincidence as the main structure is largely the same, with the player constantly required to move between hub-like towns to gain quests, and from there venture to randomly generated dungeons which are conveniently only a portal jump away. Some settlements do have their own monsters to kill but the meat and bones of the hack-and-slash gameplay on offer here is via these instances, and you'll usually need to visit the same variety multiple times.

In many ways this is what the term MMO used to mean to a lot of gamers, but after World of Warcraft, Guild Wars and City of Heroes showed us how important plot implementation can be in crafting a compelling experience, being transported from one locale to another to simply kill legions of monsters starts to feel dull very quickly.

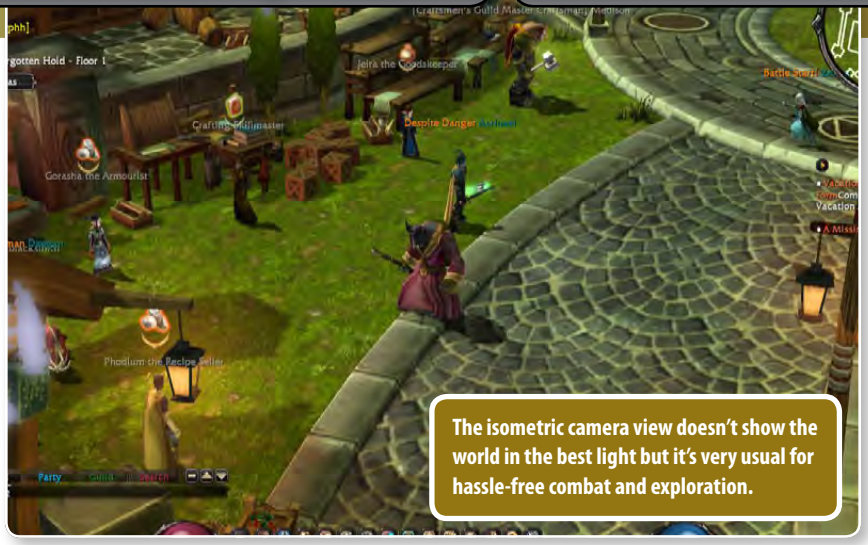
Sure, it's a free-to-play offering but the quests just feel vapid at times. The overworld environments are cute and there are some memorable activities among the litany of challenges which consist of 'go here, and talk

The monster design is interesting, although bosses are usually just bigger versions of their less-powerful colleagues.

Mythos continued

to that guy', but we were hoping for a bit more context to explain what drives the four different playable races – Satyr, Human, Cyclops, Gremlin – and why we should join one variety over another. Incidentally, there are three classes to choose from as well, which boil down to Warrior (Bloodletter), Mage (Pyromancer) and Techie (Gadgeteer).

Loot is also a major motivator, and this is something which Mythos does really well. Each item collected is stored in your limited inventory space and when you equip something, a pop-up details what you already have, so you can compare and contrast easily. In addition there's a deep crafting system to make use of any scrap, and you'll be constantly trying to figure out how best to use your avatar's loadout to get the most from your gear.



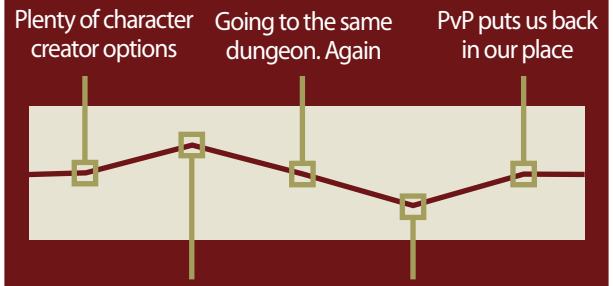
The isometric camera view doesn't show the world in the best light but it's very usual for hassle-free combat and exploration.

There are lots of community-centric features too, such as guild-specific buffs (depending on activity) and bucketloads of PvP options, but to get to all these features you'll have to put up with a lot of monotony. Thankfully the in-game store isn't lorded over non-paying players too much, although buying extra inventory space soon becomes inevitable.

There's a lot to like about Mythos, be it the endearing art-style and the reliable if not unconventional hack-and-slash combat. However, the longer you stay with it the more you you'll yearn for modern MMOs – most of which are now switching to a free-to-play model.

Unfortunately this is a product of bygone era. If you have a yearning for the good old days then Mythos will bring you some joy, but there are many more enjoyable and original free-to-play efforts out there.

PULSOMETER: Signs of life


Plenty of character creator options
Going to the same dungeon. Again
PvP puts us back in our place
Fiddling with the isometric/3D camera
Should I buy another inventory bag?

The interface borrows a lot from Diablo in terms of design.

Chests… always a great site to behold.

MMOZine Verdict

Too traditional for its own good?

- ✓ Colourful aesthetic
- ✓ Accessible
- ✗ Monotonous structure

In MMOZine Issue 32

APB RELOADED

It's back, but is San Paro now a more desirable place to visit? We check out the Beta in the next issue.

MMOZine Issue 32

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